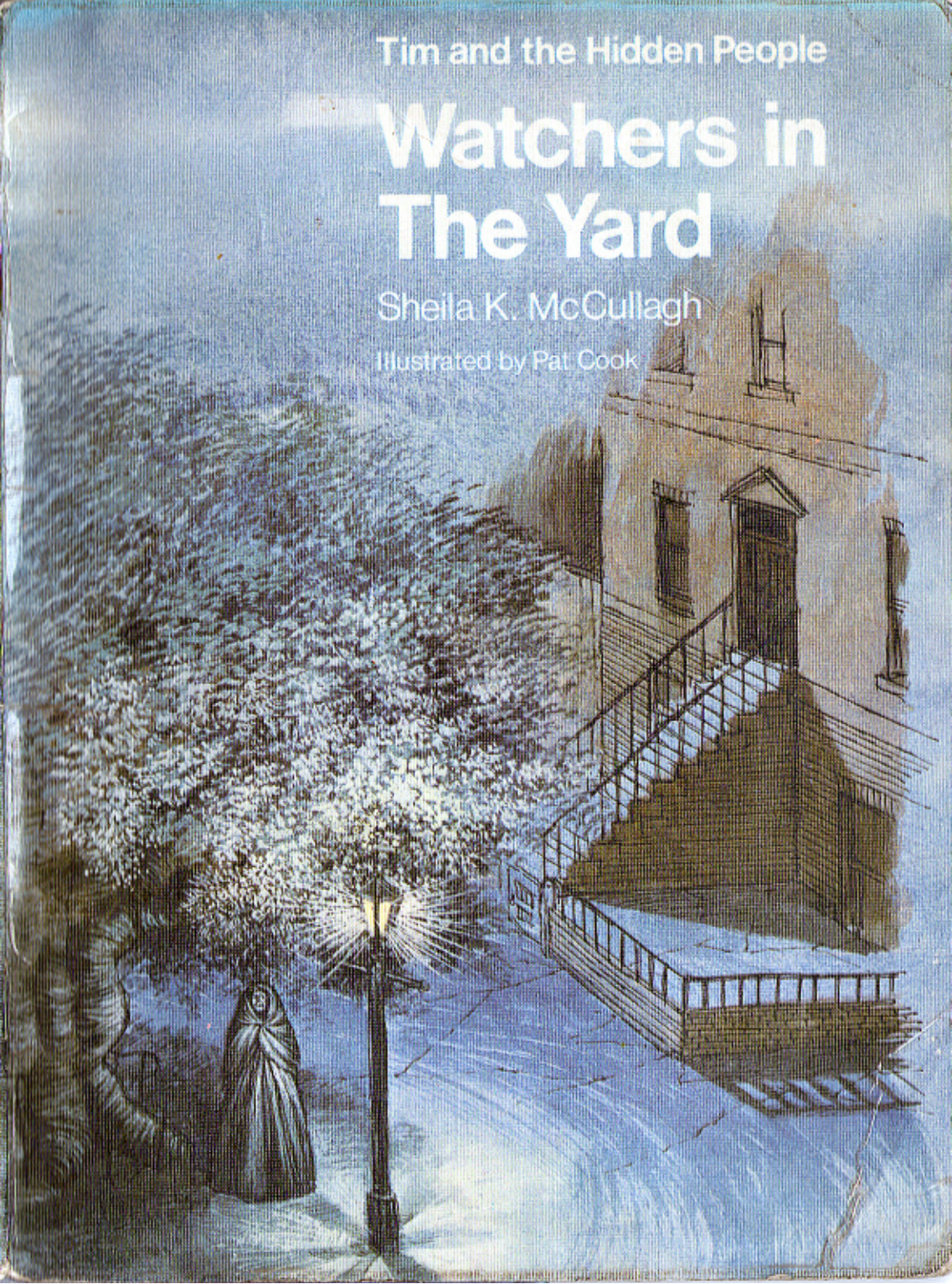


Tim and the Hidden People

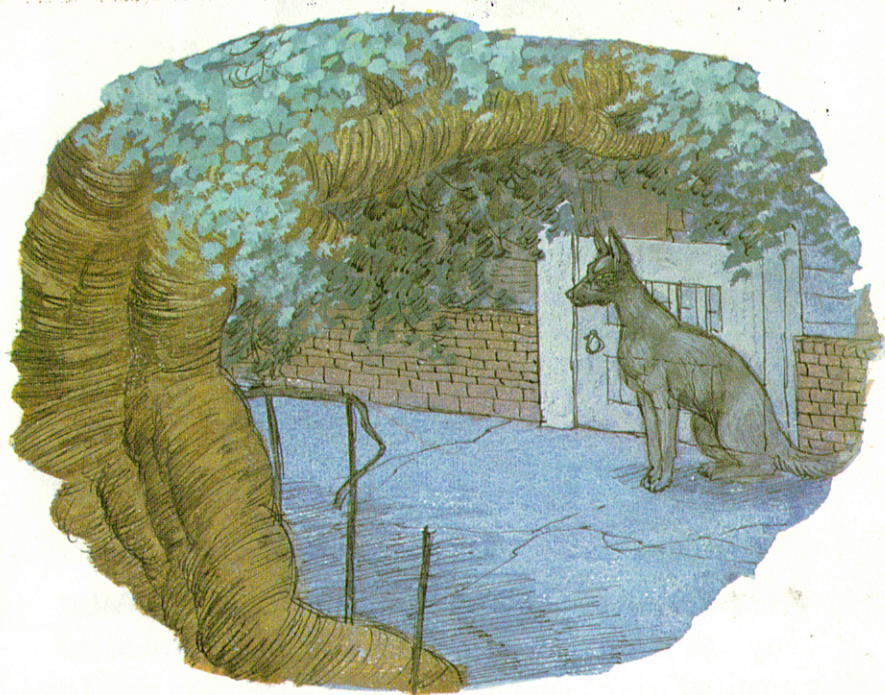
Watchers in The Yard

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



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E. J. ARNOLD & SON LIMITED LEEDS



“You’re not looking well, Tim,” said Aunt May, as Tim sat down to breakfast the next morning.

“I’m all right,” said Tim.

Aunt May shook her head. “Mr. Berryman doesn’t think so. He says you look as if you never had any sleep.”

“But I do sleep,” said Tim.

“Well,” said Aunt May, “You’d better get to bed sooner. I can’t help being out in the evening. If I didn’t help out at the shop, we wouldn’t be able to manage. Eat your breakfast.”



When Tim ran down the steps into The Yard, he saw Sita standing by the old tree. She was talking to Sebastian. Sita was Arun's sister. As soon as he saw her, Tim knew that Arun was back.

He ran over to the tree.

"Hallo, Sita. Where's Arun?" he asked.

Sebastian rubbed himself against Tim's legs, and Tim bent down to stroke him.

"He'll be out in a minute," said Sita. "We got home last night."

"I'm glad you're back," said Tim.



Aunt May opened the front door.

"Tim!" she called across The Yard. "Tim! Come here a minute."

Tim went back to the gate.

"I'll be out this afternoon, Tim," said Aunt May. "I'm going over to Mrs. Brown's to give her a hand with the new baby. Why don't you ask Arun to come and have tea? I made some cakes yesterday, and there's strawberry jam in the cupboard."

"All right," said Tim. He was surprised. Aunt May never let him bring friends home, because of the lodgers. Miss Miff always said she didn't want a lot of boys about the house.



When Tim went back to the tree, Sita had gone, but Sebastian was still there. As Tim bent down to stroke him, Arun came running across The Yard.

“Hallo, Tim,” he said. “I’ve got to go out this morning, but I’ll be back this afternoon. Sita said you were here.”

“Come to tea,” said Tim. “Aunt May’s going to be out, but she’s left us some cakes. She said you could come. I’ve a lot to tell you.”

“I’ll come,” said Arun. “I’ll get back as soon as I can. See you, Tim.” He ran off.



Tim turned back to Sebastian. Sebastian had run up the tree, and was sitting on one of the branches. Tim picked up a thin stick from the ground. He ran the end of the stick along the branch, just under Sebastian's nose.

Sebastian put out a paw. Tim jerked the stick away.

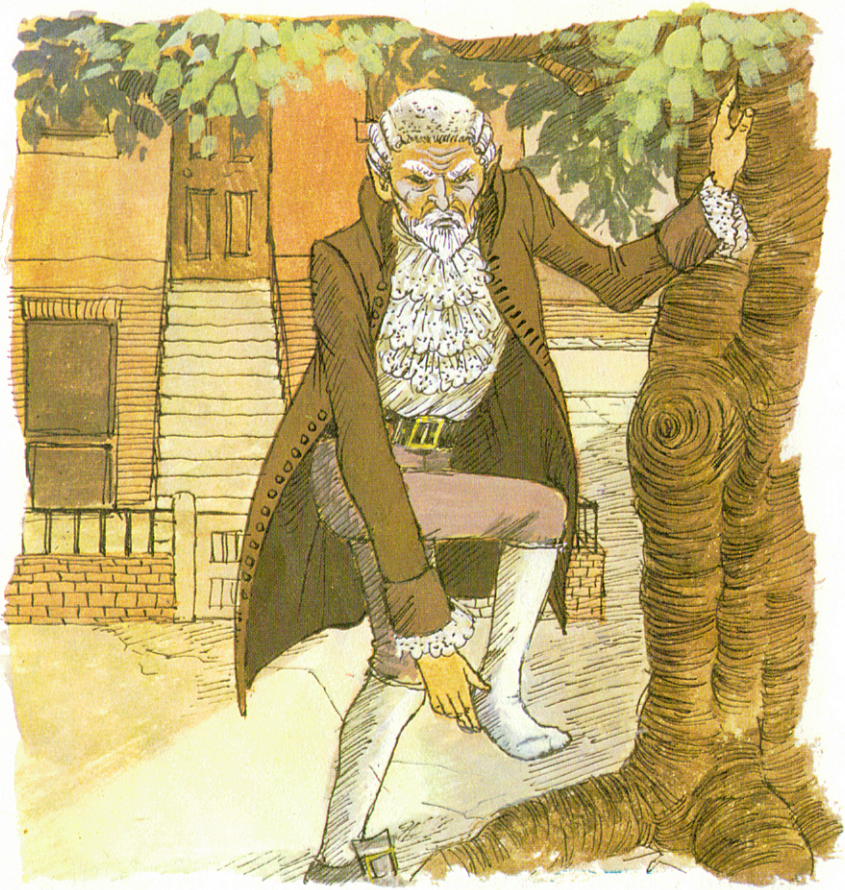


Tim was still playing with Sebastian, when a very cross voice behind him said: "So there you are!"

Tim spun round.

Knocker was standing there, looking at him.

"The trouble I have, coming to see you!" he said. "Oh, my poor feet!"



Knocker leant against the tree and lifted one foot. He dropped the shoe on the ground, and rubbed his foot with his hand.

“Why you have to live in this place, I don’t know,” said Knocker. “And why I have to come and see you, I don’t know.”

He slipped his foot back into his shoe, and lifted the other foot.

"What is it?" asked Tim. "I tried to go and see Melinda, but I couldn't get there."

Knocker dropped the other shoe on the ground.

"That's what you *say*," he said, rubbing the foot. "But that's nothing to do with me. I do what Melinda tells me, and you'd better do the same."

"I did try," said Tim.

"So you said before," said Knocker. "Well, Melinda says you're to come tomorrow. So you'd better come tomorrow."

"But I can't get there, if the stump people are about," said Tim.

"Stop saying you can't come, and let me finish, will you?" snarled Knocker. "The stump people won't be about. Melinda says you're to go by the canal. And you're to go in daylight. She'll keep the path clear for you. That means you'll have to walk, and a good job too! I hope your feet hurt you as much as mine are hurting me!"

He put his foot back into the shoe, and stood up.



“You’re to come tomorrow, and you’re to come alone. That’s what Melinda says. I’d come, too, if I were you. But then, I’m not you. I’m not Melinda’s favourite, I’m not. No, I’m only old Knocker, sent here and sent there, with his poor feet nearly falling off!”

Knocker turned his back on Tim, and hobbled off out of The Yard.



Tim went slowly back to the house, and up to his room. He tried to read, but he couldn't. He kept thinking about what Knocker had said. The morning passed slowly.

Aunt May went out at last, and Tim went down to the kitchen. He sat there, thinking, and waiting for Arun's knock.

He had a long time to wait, but at last he saw Arun come back into The Yard.

A few minutes later, Arun was knocking on the door.

"I'm sorry, Tim," he said. "We couldn't get away. I came as soon as I could."

They went downstairs to the kitchen.

Tim made the tea, and then, as they sat eating bread and strawberry jam and cakes, Tim told Arun about everything that had happened.

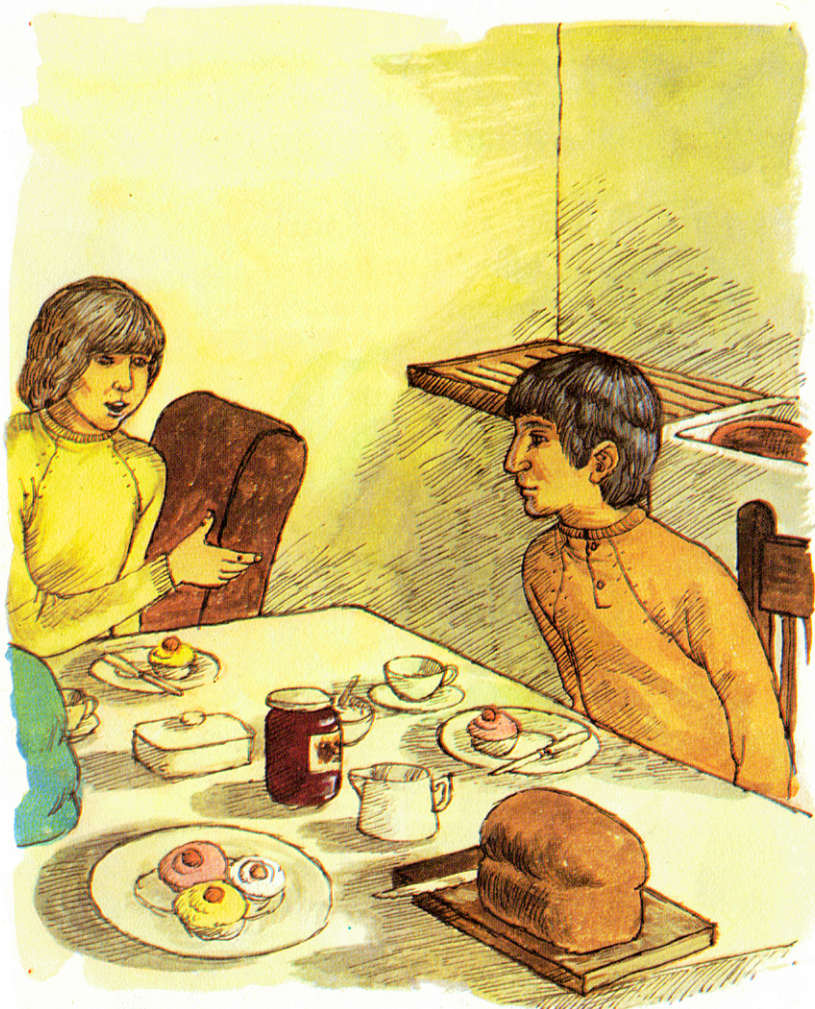
He began by telling him about Miss Miff's purse, and how the key had come back. He told him about Captain Jory, and how he had promised to help him get back to Hollow Hill. He told him about the little man in the cottage, and the stump people. He told him about Knocker, and what Knocker had said that morning.

The only thing he didn't tell Arun was that the Hidden People would move into Arun's house, if they couldn't go back to Hollow Hill.

Arun sat and ate and listened.

That was the best of Arun, thought Tim. He would always listen. He never tried to tell you about himself, when you were telling him something.





Arun must have had a good holiday. Perhaps he had had an exciting one. But he didn't say so. He wouldn't, anyway, because he knew Tim never went away anywhere.



“You know, Tim,” said Arun, “I can’t see the Hidden People. But I had a queer feeling as I came across The Yard. I felt as if someone was watching me.”

Tim pushed back his chair. “Let’s go up to my room,” he said. “You can see The Yard better from up there. There may be someone about.”

Tim led the way up to his room.



They went over to the window, and looked
down into The Yard.

“Look!” cried Tim. “Look, there!”



A little old woman was standing under the tree in the middle of The Yard.

She had a long black skirt, and a black shawl over her head.

She looked up, as Tim looked out of the window. Even at that distance, Tim could see her black eyes, staring up at him out of her white face.

Tim stepped back from the window.

"Is someone there?" asked Arun.

"Under the tree," said Tim. "Can't you see her? The old woman in the black shawl."

Arun shook his head. "I can't see anyone," he said. "There's a dark shadow under the tree. But I did feel as if someone was watching me, as I came across The Yard."

"It's getting dark," said Tim. "It's early, to get dark."

"Look at the sky," said Arun.

Black clouds were blowing up over the roof tops. The window shook in a sudden gust of wind.

"There's going to be another storm," said Tim.

Even as he spoke, a flash of lightning lit the sky. The crash of thunder which followed it was right over their heads.

The sky seemed to open, and the rain poured down, splashing against the window and streaming off the roofs of the houses.

Tim stared down into The Yard.

There was no one under the tree now. The Yard was empty.





Tim went over to the door and switched on the light.

There was another flash of lightning outside. The light went out. The thunder rolled overhead.

"The lightning must have struck the wires somewhere," said Arun.

Tim said nothing. He was used to the light going out when the Hidden People were about. He went over to the table by his bed, and lit two candles. He sat down on the bed.



Arun pulled a small parcel out of his pocket, and handed it to Tim.

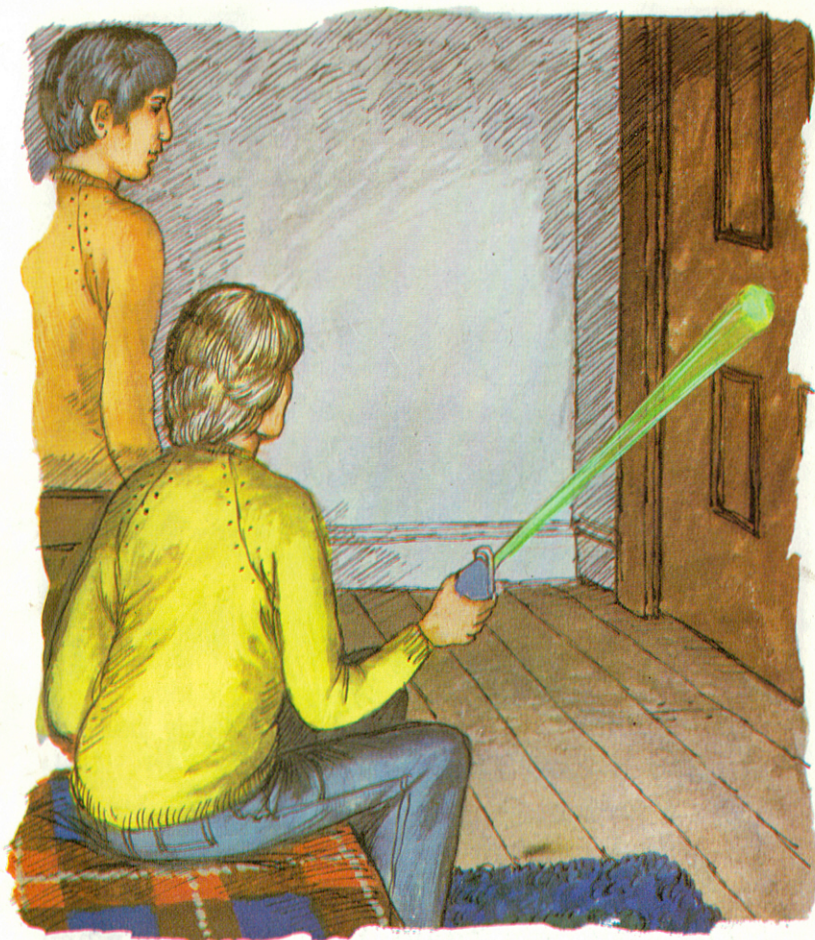
"It's a present," he said.

"But—I haven't got anything for you," said Tim.

"That's all right," said Arun. "I got it when I was away."

Tim took the parcel and opened it.

"It's a torch," said Arun. "I thought I'd bring you a lamp. A lamp brings good luck. But then I saw this torch."



Tim switched it on. A circle of light shone on the door.

“It’s got three colours,” said Arun. “If you slide the top one way, it shines green. If you slide it the other way, it shines red.”

Tim slid the top of the torch sideways. A green light shone on the door. He slid it the other way, and the light changed to white. Then, as he pushed harder, it changed to red.

"Thanks, Arun," he said. "Thanks very much."

"We could use the torches for signalling," said Arun. "I've changed my bedroom. I was at the back, but now I'm in the front attic in our house, like you. I can see your room across The Yard, even in summer. It will be better still in winter, when there are no leaves. If you flash a light in your window, I can see it, and flash back. Different flashes can mean different things. Let's make a list of signals."

They pulled the table up to the bed, and Arun lifted the wooden chair over to it and sat down.

Tim got some paper and two pencils.

"We'll make two lists," he said. "Then we can each have one, and we won't forget what the signals mean."

"When we're going to begin signalling, we'll swing the torch round and round in a big circle," said Arun.

"All right," said Tim. "What other signals shall we want?"

“We shall have to learn the morse code if we want to say very much,” said Arun. “But we can have some signals of our own, too.”

They worked out a list.

One short flash meant: ‘Yes’.

One long flash meant: ‘No’.

One long and one short flash meant: ‘I’m coming over to see you’.

Two short flashes meant: ‘Are you all right?’

If the torch was swung in a green circle, it meant: ‘I am going to stop signalling’, or ‘Goodnight’.

“We must have a signal saying: ‘Come at once’,” said Arun. “You might need me.”

“All right,” said Tim. “Three long flashes means: ‘Come over at once’.” He thought that Arun would need that signal, too, if the Hidden People ever moved into his house. But he didn’t say so.

1 short flash = yes.

1 long flash = no.

1 long 1 short = I'm coming
over to
see you.

2 short flashes = are you
all right?

a green circle = I am going
to stop
signalling,
goodnight.

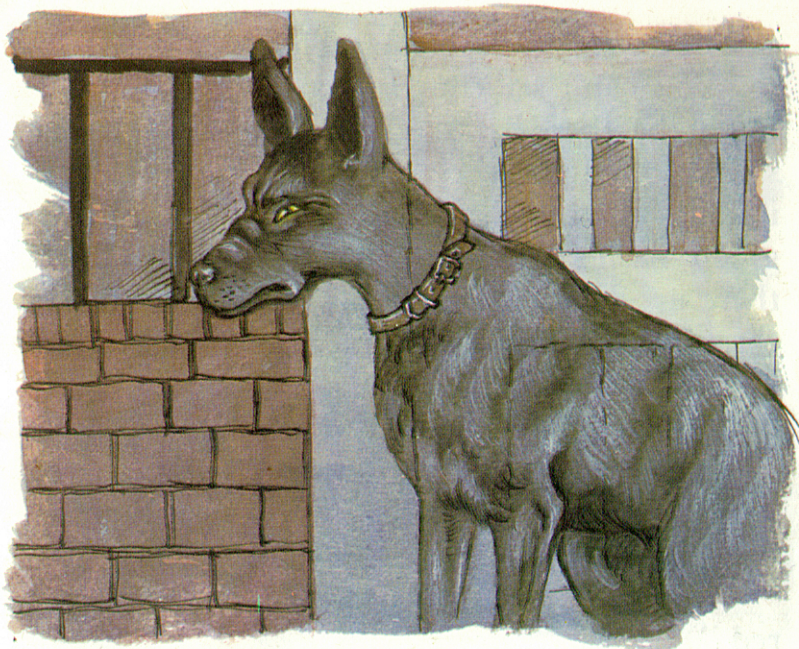
3 long flashes = Come over
at once.



“If I see three long flashes, I’ll come,” said Arun. “I’ll come any time, even if it’s midnight.”

“It might be dangerous for you to come over,” said Tim. “There might be someone watching in The Yard.”

“If I can’t see them, they can’t hurt me,” said Arun. “I shall come anyway, if you send a signal.”



Tim went over to the window and looked out.

A large black dog was sitting in front of Mr. Berryman's house. Tim liked dogs, but he didn't like the look of this one.

"Is there anyone there?" asked Arun, coming over to the window.

"Just the dog," said Tim, turning back.

"Where?" asked Arun, looking out.

"Over there, by Mr. Berryman's."

"I can't see any dog," said Arun.

"But I can," said Tim. "It's over there. That means it's one of the Hidden People."

They went back to the table.

"You can't see the Hidden People, but they might be there," said Tim. "We must have a signal to tell you they're about. I tell you what, if I signal to you to come over, I'll send three green flashes, if everything's all right. But if there are Hidden People in The Yard, I'll send three red flashes. Red for danger. Then you'll know, and you can come the back way. If I flash red, come to the back door."

"If I think I can see anyone, I'll flash red, too," said Arun. "One red flash. I sometimes see strange shadows."

"Yes," said Tim. "If you *do* see them, flash red."

"I wish I could see them," said Arun.

"Perhaps you will," said Tim. "I can't give you the key, because I promised Captain Jory that I wouldn't give it to anyone."

The light in Tim's room came on.

The town hall clock struck eight.

Arun got up.

"I'll have to go," he said, "I don't want to, Tim, but I promised to be back."

Tim looked out of the window. The Yard was empty. The rain had stopped, but it was getting dark. The lights were coming on in the houses.



“You should put a bolt on this door, Tim,” said Arun, as they crossed the room.

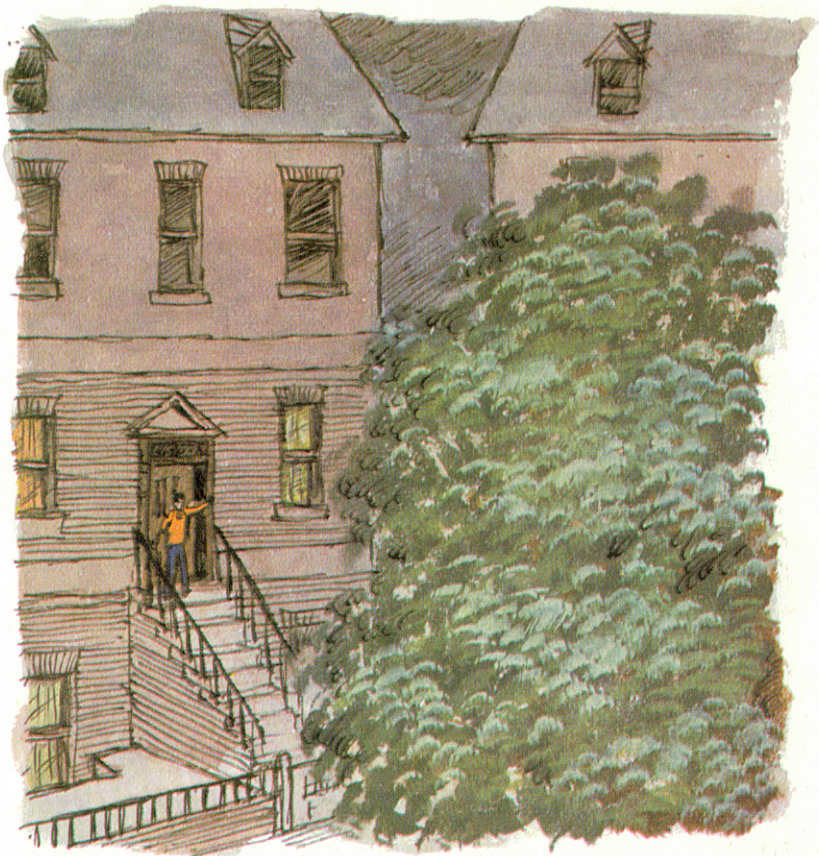
“Bolts aren’t much good,” said Tim. “Doors just open when the Hidden People want them to.”

“You said that the wooden bar in the cottage held against the stump people,” said Arun. “Perhaps you should have a wooden bar.”

They went downstairs.

“I don’t like leaving you alone, Tim,” said Arun, as he went out of the front door.

“I’ll be all right,” said Tim.

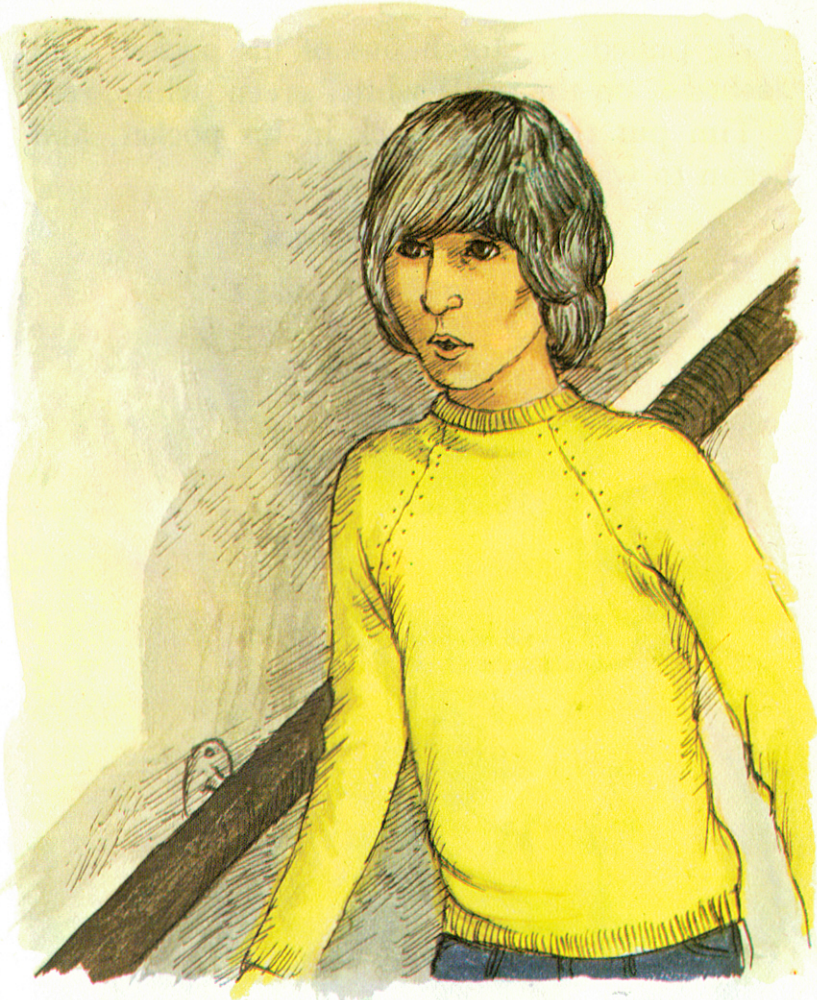


“I’ll keep looking out of my window when I’m awake,” said Arun. “Flash if you want me. Don’t forget.”

He ran off across The Yard.

Tim watched him.

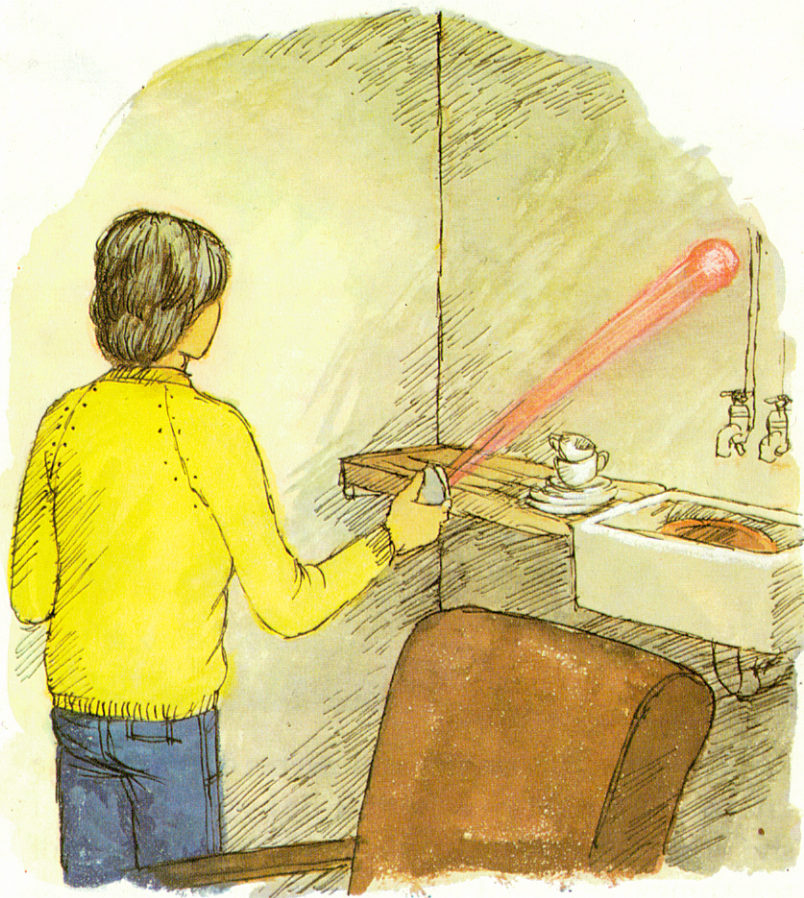
Arun turned and waved as he went into his own house, and Tim waved back.



Tim shut the door, and went down to the kitchen. Aunt May wouldn't be very pleased, if she came home late, and found the sink full of tea things.

He pulled the torch out of his pocket, and flashed it on the wall: white, green, white, red.

Tim put the torch back in his pocket, and began to wash up.



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